



Balkan Express 2019 Conference Report

The 5th International and Interdisciplinary Balkan Studies Conference

Balkan Express 2019: Living together – Tolerance, Coexistence, Reconciliation

Date: November 8-9, 2019

Location: Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Conference video: <https://vimeo.com/393261516>

Interview with Ivan Čolović: <https://vimeo.com/393264855>

The Balkan Express Conferences, organized since 2013, have become the largest conferences in Balkan Studies held on a regular basis in the Czech Republic.

Since the 1990s, academic production has prevalingly analyzed the region of Southeastern Europe through nationalist and ethnic frameworks that emphasize social conflict, resulting in a somewhat “negative” and “dark” image of the Balkans. The key goal of the Balkan Express 2019 was to seek out discourses and practices that transcend these stereotypical perceptions and conceptualizations and focus instead on examples of tolerance, coexistence and reconciliation “from below”, as they are understood, expressed, and practiced on an everyday level by the people of the Balkans themselves.

The key note speaker of the 2019 Balkan Express Conference was Ivan Čolović (Belgrade), doyen of Serbian and (post)Yugoslav anthropology, author of numerous monographs in the field of political anthropology available in many languages, public intellectual and publisher of the legendary edition of literature in social sciences *Biblioteka XX vek* since 1971. There were altogether 12 thematic panels with 34 academic presentations (30 minutes per presentation) prepared by 40 participants from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Austria, Albania, Australia, USA, Canada, Great Britain, Poland and Finland. The presenters included distinguished scholars such as Božidar Jezernik (University of Ljubljana), Keith Doubt (Wittenberg University, USA) and Risto Pekka

Pennanen (University of Helsinki) as well as many noted junior scholars but also students presenting their findings for the first time.

At the Film Panel, the ethnographic film *Bottle Herders* on formerly nomadic Bulgarian Sarakatsani shepherds by social anthropologist Gabriela Fatková was followed by fourteen short documentaries from the Balkans presented by members of the Visual Anthropology Center, a non-profit organization based in Belgrade, Serbia. The program also included three book presentations (Filip Tesař: *Etnički konflikti*, Keith Doubt and Adnan Tufekčić: *Ethnic and National Identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Vladimir Vučković and Vladmir Djordjević, eds.: *Balkanizing Europeanization*) and one author reading (Blanka Čechová: *Total Balkans*). The active participants of a special Round Table on the future of Balkan studies in the Czech Republic included several distinguished personalities of Czech Balkan Studies such as ethnologist Mirjam Moravcová, historians Ladislav Hladký and Jan Rychlík as well as junior scholars and students.

The accompanying cultural program started with the opening of the exhibition *Monte Bianco Negro* by Montenegrin designer and illustrator Dejan Batrićević, with a speech by anthropologist Alenka Bartulović (University of Ljubljana) and text by professor of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Cetinje Janko Ljumović, former minister of culture of Montenegro. Dejan Batrićević, author of the visual identity of the Balkan Express 2019, also designed the conference program and other materials. The exhibition opening was followed by a live concert of the Prague group *Džezvica*, inspired, as the name suggests, by the rhythms and melodies of the Balkans. The final social event took place at Opletalova street near Prague's central Wenceslas Square at *Lastavica – Association for the citizens of former Yugoslavia*, organization promoting tolerance, multicultural understanding, and cultivation of links and exchanges between the countries of former Yugoslavia and the Czech Republic.

František Šístek

Member of the Balkan Express organizing committee

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